

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF MAY 24-30, 2015.

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Office of Subsistence Management, USFWS.

The purpose of the weekly fisheries update is to provide the reader with an overall summary of the status of subsistence related fisheries throughout the state of Alaska. The target audience is the Federal Subsistence Board and its Staff Committee. The report was compiled with the assistance of the Federal in-season managers and OSM staff that provided weekly updated information by the close of business on Friday of the reporting week. My goal is to have the report sent by the close of business the following Monday. Web links have been included to provide additional information. You may obtain additional information on a fishery of particular interest by contacting the in-season manager, provided contacts, follow the provided web links, or contact me.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA**Sitka and Hoonah Area – Justin Koller, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest**

Justin Koller, (907)747-4297 jpkoller@fs.fed.us

Klag Bay - The Sitka Tribe of Alaska operates the Sockeye Salmon monitoring weir at Klag Bay which is scheduled to be operational the last week in June. In 2014, approximately 10,400 sockeye migrated past the weir while an estimated 4,729 sockeye were harvested in the marine terminal area subsistence and sport fishery. Subsistence harvest accounted for over 99% of terminal area harvest.

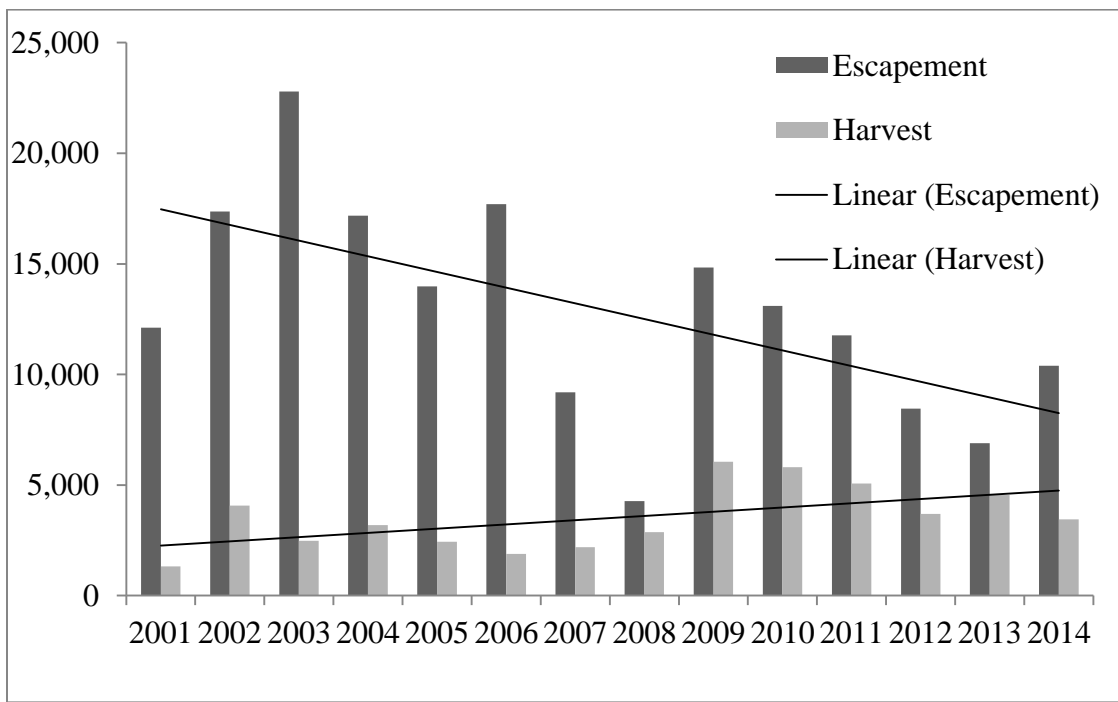


Figure 1. Escapement and harvest of sockeye at Klag Bay, 2001-2014 (Sitka Tribe of Alaska).

Redoubt Lake - The Forest Service operates the Redoubt Lake weir and video-equipped net weir which are scheduled to be operational in mid-June. In 2014, an estimated total of 20,549 Sockeye Salmon passed through the weir into Redoubt Lake. On July 15th, in accordance with the Redoubt Lake Management Plan, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game set the individual/household subsistence sockeye possession limit at 25 and the individual/household subsistence sockeye annual limit at 100. These limits were based on an in-season model prediction of greater than 30,000 sockeye returning. The preliminary subsistence sockeye harvest was 1,313.

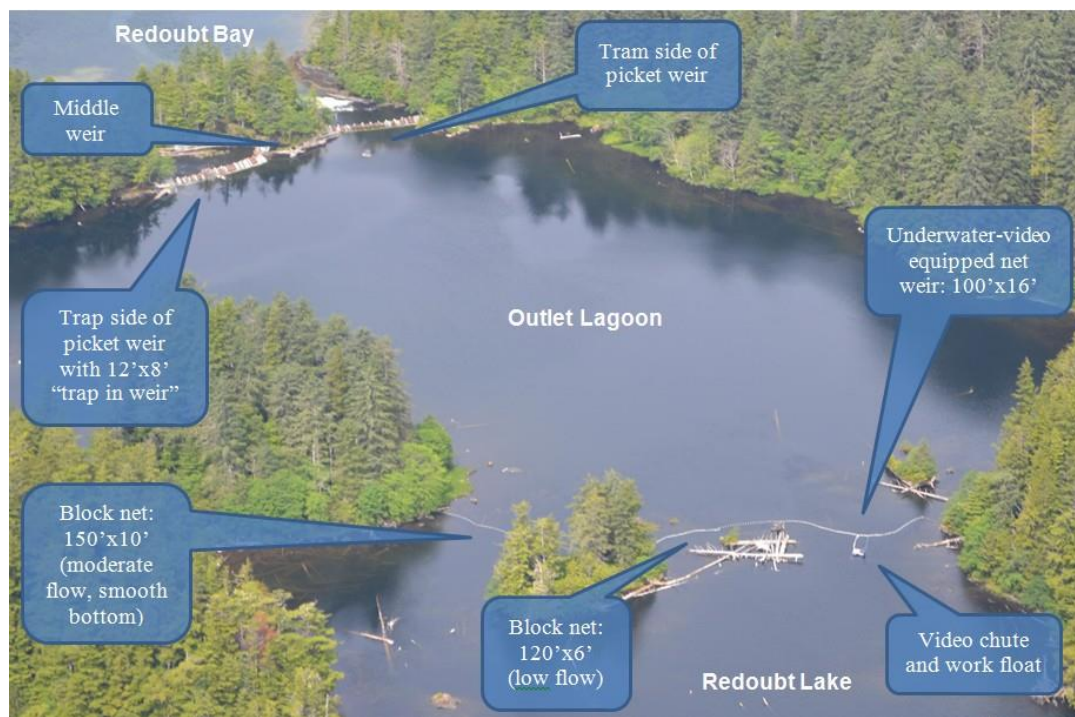


Figure 1. Aerial view (2013) of the outlet lagoon of Redoubt Lake showing the typical locations of the picket weir, net weir and block nets.

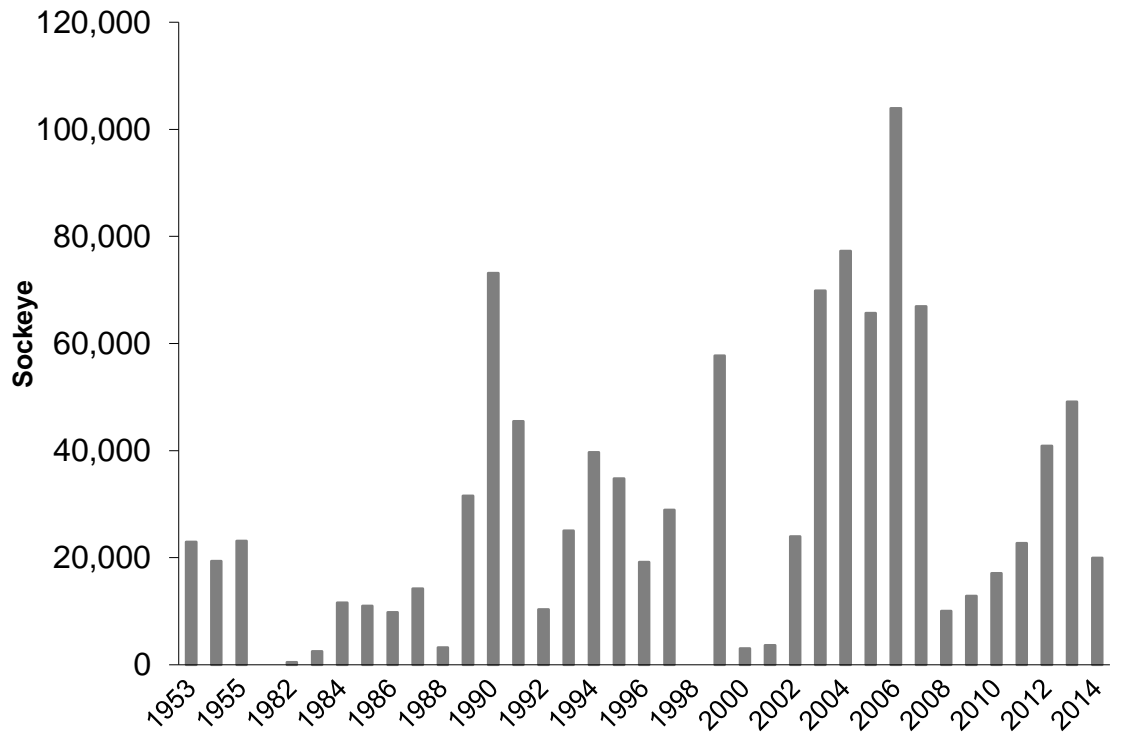


Figure 3. Annual sockeye expanded escapement into Redoubt Lake for years with data: 1953 to 1955, 1982 to 1997, and 1999 to 2014. The weir was not operated in 1998.

Falls Lake - The Forest Service and the Organized Village of Kake operate the Falls Lake trap and video net weirs which will be operational the first week of July. The final escapement estimate in 2014 was 2,748 Sockeye Salmon while the final subsistence and sport harvest in the marine terminal area was 1,542. Subsistence harvest accounted for over 95% of terminal area harvest.

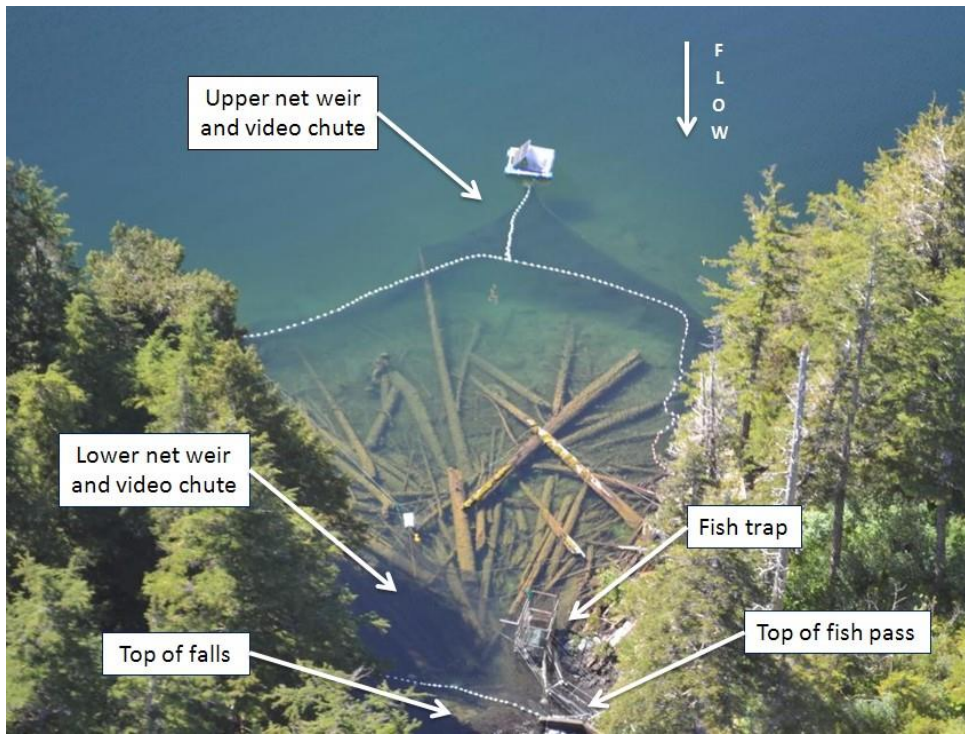


Figure 4. Aerial photo (2013) of the Falls Lake outlet illustrating the typical location of weir equipment.

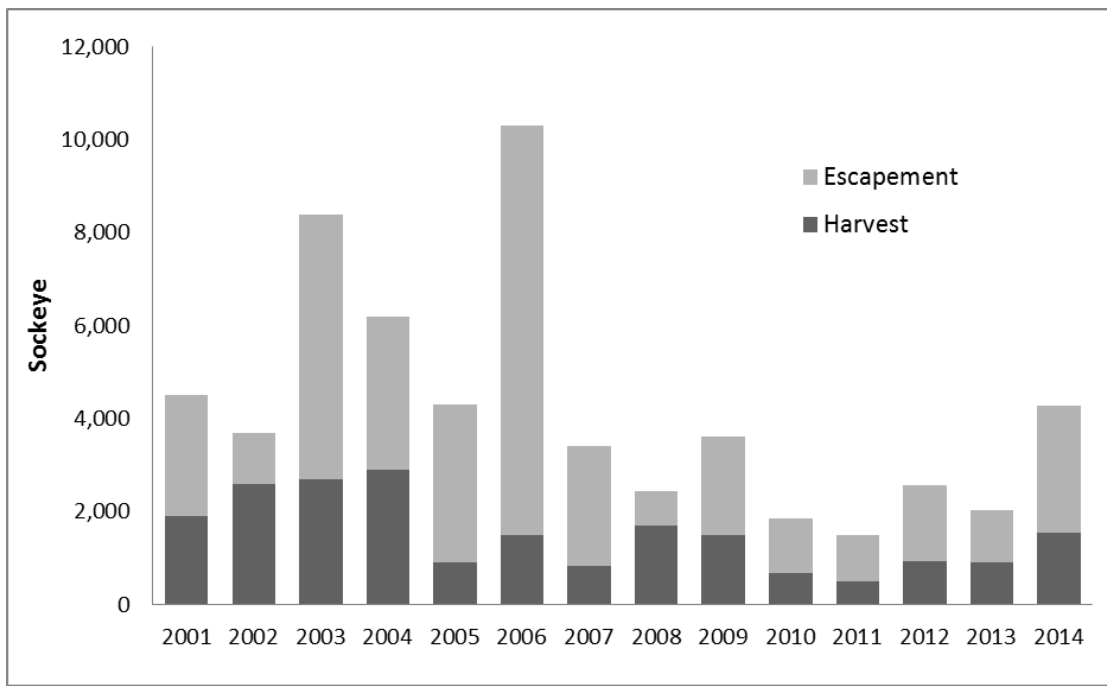


Figure 5. Escapement and harvest of Sockeye Salmon at Falls Lake, 2001-2014.

Wrangell/Petersburg Area – Bob Larson, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
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The Stikine River Chinook Salmon subsistence fishery started on May 15 and will end June 20. The U.S. Forest Service has issued 21 subsistence fishing permits to residents of Wrangell and Petersburg but there has not been any subsistence fishing on the Stikine River yet this season. Water levels in the river are high and fishing conditions are poor. The 2015 pre-season terminal run size forecast for large Stikine River Chinook Salmon (>30") is 30,200 fish. The U.S. directed fishery allowable catch is 210 fish so there will be no pre-season special action to close the Chinook Salmon subsistence fishery. The 2015 pre-season terminal run size forecast for Stikine River Sockeye Salmon is 171,200 fish. The U.S. allowable catch is 52,800 fish so there will be no pre-season special action to close the Sockeye Salmon subsistence fishery.

Subsistence Sockeye Salmon fishing in the local island streams is forecast to be average with fishing beginning in July.

The following link is the ADF&G weekly salmon commercial fishery update for Yakutat and Southeast Alaska.

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareasoutheast.salmonfisheryupdates>

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Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska - Ben Van Alen, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
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The Sockeye Salmon runs and subsistence fisheries have not started yet in the Admiralty and Juneau areas. Project personnel are preparing for the Sockeye Salmon monitoring projects at Kook Lake, Neva Lake, and Sitkoh Lake which are scheduled to begin in mid-June. Pre-season safety training is planned for early June.

In the Yakutat area, steelhead fishing on the Situk has been good and as of May 28 ADF&G personnel have counted 5,826 kelts through the Situk weir. Sockeye Salmon runs usually begin in earnest in the Yakutat area in mid-June. ADF&G forecasts a run of only 619 Chinook Salmon to the Situk River this season. In order to meet ADF&G's escapement goal range of 450 to 1,050 large Chinook Salmon ADF&G will not allow retention of Chinook Salmon in their sport and commercial set gillnet fisheries and the Forest Service will not issue permits for the subsistence take of Chinook Salmon in the river unless escapements through the weir are well within the goal. This is the sixth season that we have taken management actions to protect Chinook Salmon returning to the Situk River. There is a broad overlap in timing of these two species through the fisheries and into the river.

ADG&G has forecasted an “excellent” return of wild Pink Salmon to all of southeast Alaska this season. Returns of hatchery Chum Salmon are expected to be moderate in most areas. The Southeast Alaska purse seine fishery will begin on Sunday June 21 at Point Augusta, Tenakee Inlet, and Hidden Falls Hatchery area with a 15-hour opening targeting Chum and Pink Salmon. We should expect no changes in the conduct of the commercial purse seine fisheries in the Icy Strait, Chatham Strait, Peril Strait, or Hidden Falls Hatchery area based on actions taken at the 2015 Alaska Board of Fisheries Meeting or reported in ADF&G’s 2015 Southeast Alaska Purse Seine Fishery Management Plan. There will likely be more purse seine fishing in the Amalga Harbor special (hatchery) harvest area this season where hatchery Chum Salmon are targeted but harvests of other stocks and species are substantial.

Prince of Wales and Ketchikan District Area – Jeff Reeves, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest.

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The 2014 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko winter Federal subsistence steelhead fishery ended on February 28th. Mild winter conditions allowed for better access during this fishery. A total of 28 permits were issued during the fishery. All permits were received back and a total of 3 steelhead were reported harvested.

The Prince of Wales/Kosciusko spring Federal subsistence steelhead fishery ends on May 31st. A total of 63 permits have been issued to Prince of Wales Island residents during this fishery. Permits from this fishery being are starting to be returned and are not due back until June 15. The total reported harvest to date is 7 steelhead.

The 2014 subsistence salmon fishery for Southeast Alaska and Yakutat areas had 299 permits issued for the fishery. Just over 90% of the permits have been returned reporting a harvest of 16 Chinook, 10 Chum, 700 Coho, 125 Pink, and 1,027 Sockeye Salmon. Also reported were 9 steelhead, 2 rainbow trout, 43 cutthroat trout and 28 Dolly Varden.

Most subsistence users are actively fishing marine waters for Chinook Salmon and halibut under sport fishing regulations. Although a couple of Prince of Wales Island streams have June returns of Sockeye Salmon, most subsistence users are in preparation for subsistence harvest in July.

A Sockeye Salmon weir is currently active and fishing at Hatchery Creek. No Sockeye Salmon have been counted to date. Water flows are extremely low.

Southeast Alaska Web Links

Tongass National Forest News Room

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/news/tongass/news-events>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Southeastern Alaska Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Southeast.pdf

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=region.R1>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Southeast Alaska
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R1.home>

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA

Prince William Sound – Copper River – Molly McCormick, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park/Preserve. (907) 822-7280 Molly_McCormick@nps.gov

No report for this period.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Subsistence User's Guide
<http://www.nps.gov/wrst/historyculture/upload/Subsistence%20brochure.pdf>
Prince William Sound Federal Subsistence Regulations including Copper River.
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Prince.pdf

PWS and Copper River Flats – Milo Burcham, Forest Service, Cordova.
1 June 2014 (907) 424-4759 mburcham@fs.fed.us

No summary submitted for this period.

Cook Inlet Area – Jeff Anderson, Field Supervisor, Kenai Fish and Wildlife Field Office (907) 260-0132 Jeffry_Anderson@fws.gov

The 2015 subsistence dip net fisheries for salmon will begin on the Kenai and Kasilof rivers 15 June and 16 June, respectively. Seasons and areas for subsistence fishing with rod and reel are the same as for the taking of fish under Alaska sport fishing regulations. Most of the initial rod and reel subsistence effort will be focused at Sockeye Salmon in the Upper Kenai and Russian Rivers which opens on June 11.

Totals of 10 Kenai River permits and 6 Kasilof River permits have been issued through 26 May. USFWS and USFS staff will be issuing permits in Cooper Landing and Hope on June 3rd and 4th. No permits were issued for the Tustumena Lake ice fishery this past winter.

The Cook Inlet preseason outlook is well below average for Chinook Salmon and average for Sockeye Salmon. Based on a preseason forecast that is well below average, and below the lower bound of the 5,300 minimum escapement goal for early-run Kenai River Chinook Salmon, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game issued an emergency order to close the sport fishery through 30 June and to close the sport fishery upstream of Slikok Creek through 31 July. A Federal Special Action will likely be issued to prevent harvest of Kenai River Chinook Salmon prior to the 15 June season opener if the run comes in as projected.

Chinook Salmon are starting to enter the Kenai River. The lower river DIDSON sonar has been operational since 16 May; a total of 138 Chinook Salmon have been counted through 21 May. Early-run Sockeye Salmon should now be entering the lower Kenai River and will start to show in the upper Kenai and Russian rivers over the next week or two. The weir on the Russian River is typically operational by 10 June to monitor the return of early-run Sockeye Salmon.

Kodiak Island Area – Anne Marie LaRosa, Refuge Manager, - Kodiak NWR

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Kevin Van Hatten (907) 487-0230 Kevin_VanHatten@fws.gov

Preliminary forecasts for Sockeye Salmon returns to the Kodiak Management Area predict that there will be harvestable surpluses of fish in all sub-districts. In addition, Sockeye Salmon escapement goals are anticipated to be met throughout the area.

The Chinook Salmon forecasts are projected to be below 2014 runs for both the Ayakulik and Karluk Rivers. An Emergency Order was issued on April 7, 2015 to close sport fishing on the Karluk River and limit fishing to catch and release on the Ayakulik River. Past history trends show Chinook Salmon are not targeted by subsistence users. Management decisions on Chinook Salmon subsistence restrictions will be made after managers get a better idea on escapement numbers, which is usually in June.

A News Release was issued by Alaska Department of Fish and Game on May 5, 2015 to reduce the closed waters in Ouzinkie Harbor and Anton Larson Bay. The reductions in closed waters was in response to a Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association fish program where they are releasing excess fish which could help protect other natural runs.

Litnik (Afognak) and Buskin Rivers, as well as in front of Port Lions are common options for Kodiak subsistence users who seek to harvest Sockeye Salmon. Fishing at the mouth of the Buskin River has increased over the past couple of weeks, with up to 8 boats fishing at one time.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Kodiak Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Kodiak.pdf

Bristol Bay and Chignik – Doug McBride Fisheries Branch Chief Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office

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These areas support abundant returns of salmon, particularly Sockeye Salmon; as well as some of the largest commercial fisheries for salmon in Alaska. All of the assessments of salmon returns are conducted by the State of Alaska, and provide the basis for any inseason assessment. None of the adjustments in commercial fishing management throughout any of these areas are anticipated to affect subsistence fishing in Federally-managed waters, and these subsistence fisheries commence later in June and July.

Bristol Bay:

Preseason forecasts for sockeye salmon run returns to Bristol Bay, Chignik, and the Alaska Peninsula predict that there will be harvestable surpluses in all districts, and that escapement goals will be achieved in all systems.

For Bristol Bay, the forecast is for an extremely large return of 54 million Sockeye Salmon. Most of the sustainable escapement goals (SEG) for Bristol Bay systems were recently revised to increase the upper ranges:

System	Old SEG	Revised SEG
Ugashik	500,000 – 1,200,000	500,000 – 1,400,000
Egegik	800,000 - 1,400,000	800,000 – 2,000,000
Naknek	800,000 - 1,400,000	800,000 – 2,000,000
Wood River	700,000 – 1,500,000	800,000 – 1,800,000
Nushagak	370,000 - 840,000	370,000 - 900,000
Igushik	150,000 - 300,000	150,000 - 400,000

SEG's for Kvichak, Alagnak, and Togiak remained unchanged. Also, recently enacted regulations instruct managers to differentially aim within the escapement goal ranges depending upon run size. Practically in years of low abundance, managers will attempt to deliver escapements within the lower half of the ranges; in years of high abundance, within the upper half of the ranges.

Harvestable surpluses are projected for all systems. ADF&G Commercial Fisheries Division has strategies in place for all mixed stock districts to address differential run strength should that occur. The salmon commercial fishing season opens by regulation June 1 and weekly fishing schedules are in place until mid June.

Chinook Salmon returns have been poor to moderate in recent years throughout most of Alaska, including Bristol Bay. Commercial fishing for Nushagak Chinook Salmon is managed for an inriver return of 95,000. Some conservation measures are in place to conserve Chinook Salmon, including maximum mesh size restriction to 5 ½ inches through mid to late July in Naknek/Kvichak, Ugashik, and Togiak districts. The Chinook Salmon return to Togiak is anticipated to be poor and reduced fishing time from scheduled periods is anticipated.

Gillnets are the primary gear used for most subsistence fishing for salmon. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

Chignik:

For Chignik, the forecast for total return of sockeye salmon is approximately 1.3 million early run and 1.2 million late run fish. The forecasts for both early-run and late-run Sockeye Salmon are in excess of escapement goals. The early-run SEG was reclassified to a BEG starting in 2014. The late-run SEG includes an additional 50,000 Sockeye Salmon for additional subsistence harvest opportunity. Commercial fishing management is based on early run assessment until July 4; then late run assessment after that. Harvestable surpluses are projected for both runs, and escapement goals should be met.

The escapement goal for Chinook Salmon is 1,300 fish. Projected commercial harvest in the Chignik Management Area is 7,000 Chinook Salmon and is based upon anticipated fishing time for sockeye. In 2013, all inriver Chinook Salmon fisheries, including the new Federal subsistence fishery, was closed by E.O. (State fisheries) or Special Action (Federal fishery closed effective July 27) and no Federal subsistence harvest was realized for 2013. In 2014, there was no commercial fishery for early run Sockeye Salmon and the Chinook Salmon return was adequate to sustain inriver fisheries including the Federal subsistence fishery. The Federal subsistence fishery for Chinook Salmon is currently open until August 9 with rod and reel from a point 300 feet upstream of the ADFG weir to Chignik Lake with no daily harvest or possession limit under the authority of a Federal subsistence fishing permit. Most of the Chinook Salmon return occurs in July. Federal subsistence fishing permits are available in four communities through village or tribal administrators.

Select tributaries to Chignik Lake are open to subsistence fishing. Gillnets and seines are the primary gear used for most subsistence fishing. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

Alaska Peninsula:

There are numerous salmon stocks and fisheries throughout the Alaska Peninsula, as well as the Aleutian Islands. Several Sockeye Salmon escapements (mostly on the north peninsula) are monitored with weirs including Nelson, Bear, Sandy, Ilnik, McLees, and Orzinski rivers. Preseason forecasts are made for only the Nelson (419 thousand) and late-run Bear (505 thousand) river sockeye stocks. The largest fisheries are managed

under management plans. Management objectives vary by district and time; and include: local sockeye escapements; more distant sockeye returns to Bristol Bay or Chignik; and local Pink, Chum, or Coho Salmon returns.

A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

Stock Assessment funded under the Subsistence Fishery Resource Monitoring Program:
For 2015, there are no stock assessment projects funded under the Subsistence Fishery Resource Monitoring Program.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Bristol Bay Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Bristol.pdf

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Chignik Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/chignik.pdf

Southcentral Alaska Web Links

Federal Subsistence Management Fisheries News Releases
<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/news/fishing/index.cfm>

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.R2>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Southcentral Alaska
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R2.Home>

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

Yukon River – Gerald Maschmann, Fish Biologist USFWS Fairbanks Office.
(907)455-0406 Gerald_Maschmann@fws.gov or
Fred Bue Fredrick_Bue@fws.gov
Emmonak Summer Office (907) 949-1798

Federal staff arrived in Emmonak on May 27 to open the Emmonak Field Office for summer management activities. The office is operational can be contacted by calling (907) 949-1798.

Summer Season Outlook and Management Strategies

The summer Chum Salmon run is projected to be average to above average and to provide for escapement and subsistence uses. A surplus of 800,000 to 1,400,000 summer Chum Salmon is anticipated to be available for commercial harvest, however the commercial harvest opportunity will depend upon available markets and the strength of the overlapping Chinook Salmon run. The Chinook Salmon outlook is projecting a poor run. The run size is projected to be between 118,000 to 140,000 Chinook Salmon with managers anticipating the run near the low end based upon recent productivity. Subsistence conservation measures will be required to spread out the available subsistence harvest and meet escapement goals. No directed Chinook Salmon commercial fishery is anticipated. Public meetings were held throughout the winter and spring to inform fishers of the outlook. The following management strategies were formulated after extensive public input:

- Before Chinook Salmon enter the river, subsistence fishing opportunity for non-salmon species will be provided and gillnets will be restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size.
- As the Chinook Salmon run begins to build, subsistence salmon fishing will close chronologically in each district based on the migration timing of Chinook Salmon swimming upriver. The closure is expected to be in place to protect each of the Chinook Salmon pulses. Fishermen in the Coastal District, Koyukuk, Innoko, and Tanana Rivers should also expect some closed fishing time to protect Chinook Salmon in those areas.
- During subsistence salmon fishing closures, non-salmon species may be harvested using 4-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets not exceeding 60-feet in length. However, targeting of Chinook Salmon with this gear type will not be allowed. This opportunity to harvest non-salmon will be reduced or discontinued if this gear is used to target Chinook Salmon.
- When summer Chum Salmon become abundant, subsistence and commercial fishing opportunities will be provided with selective gear such as dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels that require the immediate and careful release of all Chinook Salmon alive.
- Fishermen are strongly encouraged to avoid fishing when and where Chinook Salmon may be encountered. Subsistence restrictions will be relaxed after the majority of the Chinook Salmon run has passed through each section of river in order to harvest other species.
- If confidence is high that the Chinook Salmon run is within the pre-season outlook range and escapement goals are likely to be met, the use of 6-inch gillnets may be considered to allow the selective harvest of summer Chum Salmon and small Chinook Salmon between pulses when incidental catches of Chinook Salmon would be expected to be low.

- The sport fishery for Chinook Salmon will be closed throughout the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage, excluding the Tanana River drainage. Chinook Salmon may not be retained or possessed. Restrictions for the Tanana River drainage will be announced in early June.
- The fall Chum Salmon run is anticipated to be of sufficient size to provide for full subsistence opportunity with a surplus for commercial harvest.
- The fall Chum Salmon commercial fishery is expected to begin in the Lower Yukon Area in the middle of July.

YRDLFA teleconferences will begin on June 2, and Federal and State managers have already visited the upriver communities of Beaver, Venetie, Chalkyitsik, and Fort Yukon and are scheduled for the communities of Pilot Station and Anvik to discuss management strategies and address fishermen's concerns next week. Additional visits to other communities are anticipated this season.

Assessment Information

Ice out on the lower Yukon River was approximately five to six days early. Additionally, Bering Sea ice has retreated off the coast, leaving the Yukon River mouth ice free. With ice out earlier than average, managers are anticipating earlier entry timing for Chinook and summer Chum Salmon. The first subsistence caught Chinook Salmon was reported on May 27. Three Chinook Salmon were caught in the Augilene Point supplemental test fishery on May 28. The ADF&G Big Eddy and Middle Mouth test fishing projects have begun. The projects have reported a few Chinook and Chum Salmon in both the drift and set net test fisheries. Efforts are being made to release alive all Chinook Salmon caught in the drift fishery in order to conserve Chinook Salmon. The department is also planning to discontinue the Chinook Salmon set net fishery when fish numbers increase to conserve Chinook Salmon. At this time it is too early to assess the strength of either the Chinook or the Chum Salmon runs. The Pilot Station sonar crew is preparing the camp and deploying the sonar system. ADF&G anticipates the sonar to be up and running on June 1. Subsistence fishermen catch reports indicate that sheefish and whitefish harvests were good since ice out, but are declining.

Management Actions

Until assessment data become available, management decisions will be consistent with the preseason projections. On May 20 the Coastal District and Districts 1 & 2 were restricted to 6-inch or less mesh gear to protect early run Chinook Salmon while providing fishermen the opportunity to harvest sheefish. On May 30, subsistence salmon fishing was closed in the northern portion of the Coastal District and Districts 1 and 2. Additionally, District 3 was restricted to 6-inch or less mesh gillnet gear to conserve Chinook Salmon. Subsistence fishing utilizing 4-inch or less mesh gear is still allowed 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Subsistence salmon fishing in the rest of the drainage is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, restricted to 7.5-inch or less mesh gear. The sequential activation of subsistence fishing restrictions will continue in all districts moving upstream.

Consultation

Extensive public outreach and consultation was performed during the fall of 2014 and spring of 2015 to inform and seek input from Yukon River fishermen and stakeholders. Run outlook and possible management strategies were discussed at Federal RAC meetings and State AC meetings, the State Board of Fish meeting, the Federal Subsistence Board work session, and the Yukon River Panel meetings. In April, a pre-season planning meeting was held in Anchorage that brought together representatives from most Alaskan Yukon River communities to discuss the run outlook and management options. In addition to regular meetings, state and federal managers have visited several villages in person to discuss fish management and hear local's concerns. Additional meetings are planned during the season as the run progresses.

Kuskokwim River – Brian McCaffery, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Brian McCaffery@fws.gov or Robert Sundown (907) 543-1007 Robert_Sundown@fws.gov

Overview

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game test fishery became operational on May 25. The Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group met on May 27. Weirs crews continue to work to make weirs operational by mid-June.

Bethel Test Fish

The Bethel Test Fishery operated by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game has reported catching a few Chinook salmon but nothing has been posted to the cumulative dataset on their website. This is the earliest the Bethel Test Fishery has operated in recent history

Management Actions

There are Special Actions in place for the Chinook Salmon fishery on the Kuskokwim and salmon tributaries. These actions took effect on May 21, 2014 and impose restriction on gillnet use mesh size (4" or less) used in the gillnet fishery in the Kuskokwim river and the following salmon tributaries; the Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, Tuluksak and the Aniak river. There have been 3 Special Actions to date with Special Action 3-KS-01-15 and 3-KS-03-15 still in effect. Next week, on June 7th, a complete tributary closure is anticipated on the Kwethluk, Kasigluk, Kisaralik, Tuluksak, and Aniak rivers for gillnets. A permit fishery for a directed salmon fishery using 6 inch gear is also expected to begin on June 10th.

The Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group met. There was concern over the distribution strategy of Chinook salmon between residents within the refuge and residents upriver of the refuge with regard to an allocation fishery.

Yukon-Kuskokwim-Interior Alaska Web Links

Federal Subsistence Management Fisheries News Releases:

<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/news/fishing/index.cfm>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Yukon–Northern Area

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Yukon.pdf

NEW = Kuskokwim River Updates Hosted on OSM Website

<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/kuskokwim.cfm>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Kuskokwim Area

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Kusko.pdf

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order link:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=region.R3>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Interior Alaska:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R3.home>

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

Northwest Alaska – Ken Adkisson, National Park Service, Nome.

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There is not much fishing activity to report this week. Being this far north our fisheries cycles including run timing and fishing activity tend to be days to several weeks behind those further south. However, the larger rivers are open, and conditions are progressing rapidly toward summer. A lot of the ice has gone out and some marine waters have opened up earlier than last year. Currently the waters south of Nome including Norton Sound are largely open. However, the area north of St. Lawrence Island and through the Bering Strait including Kotzebue Sound still has ice of varying conditions including drifting pack ice. Currently low concentrations of ice flows are expected to move out of the Chukchi Sea through the Bering Strait toward St. Lawrence Island and melt along the way.

This has affected local subsistence users in varying degrees depending upon where they live. For example hunters from the community of Shishmaref are currently engaged in active sea mammal hunting, and appear to be headed toward a potentially very good harvest of bearded seal. However walrus have not yet appeared at Wales or Shishmaref.



23 May 2015 – Ice off the coast of Wales
Photo Courtesy of Amos Oxerok



25 May 2015 – Shorefast ice in Shishmaref
Photo Courtesy of Curtis Nayokpuk

Norton Sound Area

2014 Season Summary:

The 2014 season closed with several highlights and a couple of disappointments.

Highlights in the commercial fisheries included the highest exvessel value on record and exceeded 1 million dollars; the Elim and Norton Bay Subdistricts had record Coho Salmon harvests; and overall the harvest of Coho Salmon exceeded the forecast range of 60,000 to 90,000 fish; the Chum Salmon run was much stronger than expected and the commercial harvest was 107,167 fish (previous to 2010, the commercial harvest had not exceeded 100,000 in over 20 years), even though chum salmon fishing was delayed until July in the Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts in order to protect Chinook Salmon; and the Pink Salmon harvest of 182,053 fish ranked eighth out of 27 even-numbered years, and was 17% above the even-year average harvest of 155,367 fish.

The disappointments were: 1) continued weak Chinook Salmon escapement runs throughout Norton Sound where meeting escapement goals required long closures to southern Norton Sound subsistence fishing, and 2) closing the Pilgrim River to subsistence fishing for the fifth time in 6 years because of Sockeye Salmon escapement concerns.

Overall, on a positive note, Chinook Salmon escapement goals were met throughout Norton Sound (although at a price of long closures to subsistence fishing in some areas); the Pilgrim River was late reopened when Sockeye Salmon escapement was ensured of being reached; and, based on escapement monitoring information, Chum, Coho, and Pink Salmon escapement goals were likely achieved throughout Norton Sound.

2015 Outlook:

ADF&G bases its salmon outlooks on qualitative assessments of parent-year escapements, sibling relationships, and subjective determinations of freshwater overwintering and ocean survival. The Chinook Salmon run is expected to be very weak this year. No commercial fishing targeting Chinook Salmon is expected in Norton Sound.

Subsistence restrictions aimed at protecting Chinook Salmon are also expected for southern Norton Sound. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is currently holding meetings in eastern Norton Sound communities to discuss possible restrictions. ADF&G is seeking input from the communities as to how best to maximize returns of Chinook Salmon while providing harvest opportunities for other fish such as Chum salmon. The Chinook Salmon run is expected to be early again, and restrictions to subsistence fishing could begin as early as June 8 in southern Norton Sound.

Overall, the commercial outlook for the Norton Sound area is no Chinook commercial harvest, no Sockeye Salmon commercial harvest, 60,000 to 90,000 Coho salmon, 25,000 to 75,000 Pink salmon, and 70,000 to 100,000 Chum Salmon. ADF&G has announced a closure to sport fishing for Chinook Salmon in all waters from Black Point to Point Romanof effective June 8, 2015. This will include marine waters as well as freshwaters including but not limited to the Koyuk, Ungalik, Inglutalik, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet, and Golsovia river drainages.

The herring run in Norton Sound occurred about 10 days earlier than expected. This led ADF&G to open a commercial herring bait fishery to set gillnets effective May 18 until further notice. The department established a bait herring market quota of approximately 70 tons of bait herring this season. The processing and buying operations were limited to the Norton Sound Seafood Products processing plant in Unalakleet.

Kotzebue Sound Area

2014 Season Summary:

The 2014 season closed on high notes. The Chum Salmon run yielded the second largest commercial harvest on record – 633,261 Chum Salmon compared to the high of 677,239 in 1981. The Kobuk River Chum Salmon aerial survey count was one of the highest recorded, and the Noatak River Chum Salmon aerial survey count was a record. The Kobuk River test fish index was the highest on record for the 22-year project history, and was over 50% higher than the previous record set last year. There were three major buyers last year instead of one major buyer as in the last 10 years. While buyers were purchasing only Chum Salmon, the harvest retained for personal use included 10 Chinook Salmon, 16 Sockeye Salmon, 320 Pink Salmon, 28 Coho Salmon, 620 Dolly Varden, 228 sheefish, and 28 whitefish.

2015 Outlook:

The outlook for the Kotzebue District Chum salmon run is based on parent year escapement and returning age classes observed in the commercial fishery and in the test fish samples from the Kobuk River in 2013. The 2015 outlook for commercial salmon harvest is 633,000 Chum Salmon; and no commercial harvest for Chinook, Sockeye, Pink, or Coho Salmon.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for the Kotzebue Area

<http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/pdf/fishregs11/norton.pdf>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for the Kotzebue and Norton Sound Areas

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Kotz.pdf

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Norton.pdf